

Opening Statement
Improving Drought Monitoring and Forecasting
H.R. 5136

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would first like to thank you and this committee for holding this hearing on a very important topic: drought. Like so many areas of the country, my home district has been tormented with drought—so much so that the USDA has declared every county in my district a primary disaster area. Droughts have a devastating effect on our local, state and national economies. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimates that drought results in a \$6-\$8 billion loss each year to the economy. It is clear that we need to do a better job preparing and mitigating this disaster.

The bill that I have introduced, HR 5136, will coordinate drought efforts between local, state, and federal entities and provide decision makers with the best tools to manage our natural resources. It addresses a fundamental problem our nation faces related to drought monitoring—it helps coordinate what are now

ad hoc efforts and better disseminate useful information to the people who need it the most. I am pleased that this bill is supported by the Western Governor's Association, the Texas Farm Bureau, and the American Meteorological Society.

The bill designates the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as the lead agency to devise this integrated system. It directs NOAA to build a national drought monitoring and forecasting system, create a drought early warning system, provide an interactive drought information delivery system, and designate mechanisms for improved interaction with the public. This bill will hopefully improve our analysis of conditions, provide us with more accurate seasonal forecasts, and equip us with a better understanding of the climate interactions that produce droughts. While we can't stop nature, we can do a better job predicting, monitoring, and mitigating this devastating problem.

I would like to welcome the panel of experts today and I look forward to hearing your perspectives on drought and how we can

better address the long-term problem. I would particularly like to welcome Mr. Kenneth Dierschke (DERshKE), President of the Texas Farm Bureau. As a cotton farmer from San Angelo, Texas, he knows first hand how drought affects our economy. He also knows why we need better resources to address this problem.

Welcome.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for this hearing. I yield back the balance of my time.